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## **KH Swordsman takes the fight from land to sea**

By Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Matthew Reinhardt, Kitty Hawk public affairs

**USS KITTY HAWK, At sea** – Fire Controlman 2nd Class (SW/AW) Branden Davis spends his days on USS Kitty Hawk (CV 63) mastering different high-tech combat systems, but before he enlisted he had mastered a decidedly low-tech combat system: the sword.

At 13, Davis joined M.E.L.E.E. (Martial Enactment League Enabling Expression) an organization in Tulsa, Okla., whose members study and exercise martial combat skills associated with the ancient world, Middle Ages, and Renaissance.

“The age bracket would range from 13 to 40 or 50-year-old guys,” said Davis. “Thirteen was the minimum age to begin. Any younger and it would be too easy to get hurt.”

The weapons used by M.E.L.E.E. members are padded, said Davis, but the combat is full contact, so injuries were common.

“A good friend of mine hit me in the face with his shield and put my teeth through my top lip,” said Davis. “Other than that, there was nothing too serious. We’d have broken toes and fingers all the time.”

While the battles were tough and combatants could be brutal to one another, in the end everyone understood it was just a game, said Davis.

“I had a lot of good friends in there with me which made it even more enjoyable, even when we were fighting against each other,” said Davis

Davis said he fought with M.E.L.E.E. for 12 years before he joined the Navy four years ago. Now 30, Davis has participated in more than 5,000 battles, and says he still fights when he's home. He said he next hopes to be stationed back in the United States so he can participate more often.

“It was an awesome thing to be involved in, especially once you got comfortable, then you can square off against a group of people with confidence,” said Davis. “Really, growing up that way did a lot for my self esteem and my pain tolerance.”

There were several types of battles hosted by the organization, said Davis. All the members are split into permanent teams of 20 to 30, who would fight for ranking. Tournaments would include: “last-man standing” battles; small groups tactics, where 2-3 man groups would battle; and larger groups with two teams of more than 150 people, said Davis.

Rules for the games would vary among the many types of battles, said Davis. However, some rules remained constant, such as no intentional hits to the face, neck or groin. Any combatant who took a solid hit to the torso was considered dead.

“You treat the ‘wounds’ according to what you’re hit with and how hard,” said Davis. “Getting hit in the shin with a short sword is treated differently than with a two-handed axe.”

“Sometimes you don’t have to act,” he said. “I’ve had my legs knocked out from under me and usually you wouldn’t want to get back up after that. There were field judges to regulate, because as you can imagine, tempers could get out of hand fairly easily.”

Davis said his favorite weapon is a bastard sword, which is halfway between a one-handed and two-handed sword.

“The bastard sword is truly utilitarian,” said Davis. “It’s long enough to give you more reach, but short enough that you’re not helpless if someone gets too close.”

Davis said the war games were exercises in tactics and strategy. He said Sun Tzu’s “The Art of War” and modern military manuals on small unit tactics were considered “required” reading by participants. History buffs would bring ancient Roman tactics or Japanese fighting styles, he said.

“It was great exercise,” said Davis. “If you run for four hours straight, swinging a weapon around, you’re going to be in decent shape. Some of the fighters would wear 40 or 50 pounds of armor. Wearing all that and trying to run up a hill at the enemy takes a certain amount of endurance.”

Davis said other Sailors give him a hard time for his hobby, calling him “sword master.” Davis said it doesn’t bother him though, because every time he tells them to pick up a stick and sword fight him nobody’s ever willing to try.

Davis, the CS-57 work center supervisor, configures the advanced combat direction system, which allows the carrier to see air, surface and sub-surface threats.

“He’s mastered the systems better than anyone,” said Chief Fire Controlman (SW/AW) John Krause, CS-5’s leading chief petty officer. “Davis is very mature and leads by example, he’s what every Sailor should strive to be.”

Krause said he’s known Davis for two years, but only recently found out about Davis’ swordsmanship.

“He’s not a [selfish] kind of guy,” said Krause. “If he’s got something, he’ll share it. He’s got a lot of humility and compassion, but he doesn’t doubt himself.”

“[Davis] has the ability to face an [uncommon] experience, one that nobody has ever had to deal with, and tackle it head on with confidence,” said Krause.

The Kitty Hawk Strike Group is the largest carrier strike group in the Navy. It includes the Kitty Hawk, the aircraft squadrons and staff of Carrier Air Wing 5, the guided-missile cruisers USS Shiloh (CG 67) and USS Cowpens (CG 63), and Destroyer Squadron 15 staff. The group’s ships and destroyer squadron staff operate from Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Japan, and the air wing and staff operate from Naval Air Facility Atsugi, Japan.

To find more news about the Kitty Hawk Strike Group, visit the Navy NewsStand at [www.news.navy.mil/local/cv63](http://www.news.navy.mil/local/cv63).